

Copyright Lighting&Sound America September 2009  
 http://www.lightingandsoundamerica.com/LSA.html

# Rent Party:

## Jon Pollak on Touring with Steely Dan

That inimitable jazz-rock duo Steely Dan keeps rolling on, mightily enjoying the second (or is it third?) act of their careers. This summer's tour is named *Rent Party '09* and it features two distinct formats. On classic album nights, they play the contents of one of three albums—*Aja*, *Gaucho*, or *The Royal Scam*—in its entirety. On Internet request nights, the set list is determined by the online votes of ticket holders for that performance.

All of which made for some interesting times for the lighting designer, Jon Pollak. He has traveled with Steely Dan for years and has programmed looks for a vast number of their songs. But this tour drew on less familiar material, so he often found himself in the unfamiliar position of being at

Square One. At the same time, management was watching costs. "I found out that there weren't going to be any production rehearsals; we were going in cold," Pollak says. "But they still wanted a new design."

The designer went to work on the material. "Then," he says, "we arrived for the load-in of the first show, in Raleigh, North Carolina. I had 14 songs that we had never done. We were scheduled to have two days to tidy up the cues, but one day got cut, so I started programming at breakneck



speed." He hoped to pick up some extra cueing time at soundcheck, but, he wryly admits, the musicians out-foxed him. "They skimmed the charts and played like they had been playing the songs forever," he says, amused at his own predicament. "I had one pass at each song; I was on headset, throwing out notes to my crew about what to do and what to fix. This went on for a good week and a half."

Overall, it's a different creative experience for Pollak. "The set is laid out with one song after another in rapid succession. They machine-gun their way through the set. They also play longer than they ever have—and there's not a lot of jamming. I designed it so that one number links to another—which I could do, because each set list is based on an album." On Internet request nights, however, anything goes, because Pollak doesn't know the set list until late, and the songs may or may not be familiar to him. Once again, he programs at supersonic speed.

Pollak's rig features three straight trusses with 40 Martin MAC 2000 Wash units, and 20 Mac 700s, 26 ETC Source Fours, plus a set of Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlaze 72 LED units, all controlled by a High End Systems Hog iPC unit running Wholehog II software. The gear was supplied by Upstaging. The Upstaging crew members are Jim Michaelis, Blake Elkin, and Mark Powell. The *Rent Party* comes to an end at the beginning of this month. ☼

## RAISING THE STAKES



MGM Grand Theater at Foxwoods - Mashantucket, Connecticut

THEATRE PLANNERS  
**Schuler Shook**

Chicago 312 944 8230

Minneapolis 612 339 5958

Dallas 214 747 8300

[schulershook.com](http://schulershook.com)

CIRCLE READER SERVICE 11

Photo: Todd Kaplan